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LARKSPUR GENERAL PLAN 1973

INTRODUCTION

An officially adopted General Plan is required by the state of California for all counties and general law cities. The General Plan is a document stating community policies and goals for development, conservation and redevelopment over a long-range time span, often up to twenty years. This does not preclude revision of the Plan within that period; rather, this time period is employed to encourage integration of short-range projects into long-term perspective.

Recently the scope of mandatory subjects, or "elements," to be included in the Plan was expanded by the state. Prior to 1970 General Plans such as the Larkspur 1965 Plan were only required to cover land use, housing, and circulation. By January 1974, conservation and open space, seismic safety, public safety, noise, and scenic highway elements must be incorporated into the General Plan.

State planning law specifies that the General Plan be comprehensive and long-term within the limits of legitimate authority. More important than spatial limits—the Larkspur General Plan takes in the City and "any land outside its boundaries which . . . bears relation to its planning"—are parameters of legal jurisdiction: the General Plan essentially covers *physical development in the interests of public health, safety and welfare*. Nonetheless, physical development planning has obvious social dimensions. The General Plan helps to determine the composition and quality of life of the citizenry. Comprehensiveness also means that the General Plan must weave the nine elements together. This is done by relating them to certain basic objectives and by coordinating physical development goals in the circulation and land use map.

The following studies were made in preparation for the 1973 Plan:

- Land use
- Visual analysis of the community
- Population characteristics
- Central business district
- Economy and employment
- Housing
- Circulation
- Community facilities and public services
- Geologic and seismic conditions
- Noise levels near Highway 101

This document summarizes the General Plan adopted by the Larkspur City Council in December 1973. The full text of the Plan, including a more complete statement of objectives, standards and background information for each element is available at the Larkspur City Hall.

BACKGROUND

The history and character of Larkspur have been molded by attractive setting and advantageous location. Located ten miles from San Francisco—a short if sometimes congested commute across the Golden Gate Bridge—Larkspur lies at the foot of the Northridge of Mount Tamalpais. Redwoods and madrone grow up the canyons leading into the Northridge. Corte Madera Creek, navigable to small craft when the tide is in, moves down the center of the valley along which Larkspur has grown. Early development clung to relatively flat, stable lands bordering the tidal muds and marshes adjacent to the Creek. In more recent years an Army Corps of Engineers flood control project and filling of tidelands areas have reduced the marshes and allowed construction to close in on the Creek. As buildable land has become more scarce, development has also climbed into the hills.

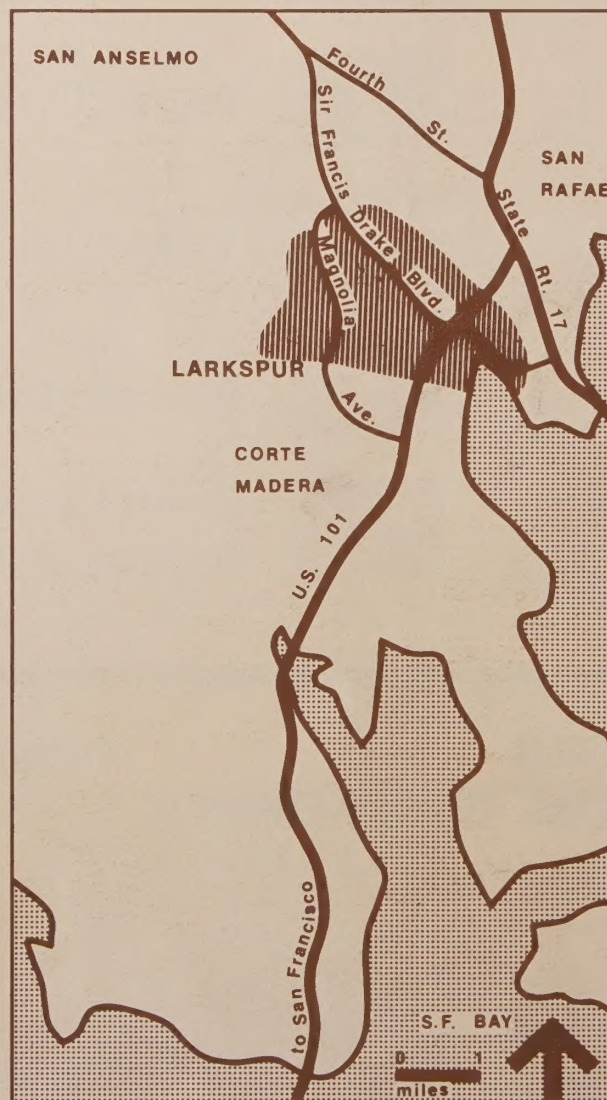
Before incorporation in 1908 and during its early years as a City, Larkspur's population swelled seasonally with summer residents. Population growth picked up with the completion of the Golden Gate Bridge in 1937 and gathered momentum after World War II. By 1970 the population of Larkspur was over 13,000, partly attributable to annexation but primarily to new development and immigration. The regional role of the town shifted from a

summer haven to a commuter community, with approximately 48% of the labor force employed in San Francisco in 1970. In many respects Larkspur is not a "bedroom" community, however. While not central to Eastern Marin County in the same sense as San Rafael, coupled with neighboring Corte Madera it provides several local and subregional shopping areas, recreation and educational facilities, and employment. Its accessible location along Highway 101 makes it highly competitive for development.

Today the most significant issues identified by Larkspur citizens and their elected officials revolve around problems brought on by recent growth and development trends. First, the community is concerned that the natural assets of the area—undeveloped hill-sides, Bay, marsh, Corte Madera Creek—be preserved as open space. This marks an effort to retain those features of the landscape which give form and character to the City. Secondly, the community seeks to retain a housing mix which will encourage social and economic diversity. This is in response to a trend towards rising housing costs and an increasingly exclusive residential character.

From the Citizens' Advisory Committee comes this overall goal: *Recognizing that the City of Larkspur has a unique physical and natural setting and residential character which must be preserved and enhanced while still accommodating suitable new development, and also recognizing that it is in the public interest to discourage premature and unnecessary conversion of open space and existing developed land to more intensive urban uses . . . Larkspur's primary goal is to retain the quality of life and environment in the community.*

City pl. Larkspur
[Larkspur City Council]



REGIONAL CONTEXT

Many individual activities and public facilities and services cross local boundaries. Mobility allows today's population to participate in a number of communities for business and shopping, education, employment, recreation, and services. Moreover, Larkspur residents are provided utility, sanitary, transit and pollution control services from special districts whose jurisdictions link communities, often at the County or even multi-County level. For these reasons it is critical that certain dimensions of planning be fit into a broader context. Recognizing the importance of regional and subregional coordination, the General Plan seeks to complement the Countywide Plan and those aspects of local planning which have inter-community impact:

Coordination with Corte Madera

Sharing an extensive common boundary, the communities of Larkspur and Corte Madera together form the Lower Ross Valley urban core. Today their common interests encompass open space preservation, circulation and land use planning, and sharing certain public facilities. Specific aspects of planning include:

- Preparing a Northridge open space preservation program in conjunction with Mill Valley.
- Recommending Highway 101 interchange and access improvements so as to better serve the Lower Ross Valley while minimizing disruption of existing development.
- Planning an integrated bicycle trail system in the two communities.

Sphere of Influence

The Larkspur General Plan covers an area, or "sphere of influence," which extends beyond City limits to include the entire south side of the San Quentin Peninsula, unincorporated Greenbrae, and part of Kentfield. These unincorporated areas adjacent to Larkspur are considered within Larkspur's sphere of influence because they are functionally part of the community, sharing educational facilities, recreation, and other services. Moreover, proximity means that they and Larkspur are jointly affected by development and activities in the Planning Area.

Countywide Plan

Among the most important Countywide Plan goals incorporated in this Plan are those relating to open space, conservation, housing and employment:

- In the eastern City-Centered Corridor a Countywide open space agency should secure open space.
- Protect and conserve waterways, the Bay shoreline and ridge-lines.
- Relate new development to existing community character, community centers, and transportation.
- Regulate residential growth rates and locations; ensure availability of low and moderate priced housing, dispersed in the community.
- Expand local employment.

In the realm of transportation, the City of Larkspur agrees with the Countywide goals of expanding transit and developing a multi-modal transportation system. The General Plan supports the Countywide Plan recommendations that employment opportunities be expanded in the Lower Ross Valley, and accordingly, provision has been made for development of some lands for commercial, industrial, and professional office activities.



Larkspur has at least four historic sites worthy of preservation: the Escalante Winery, City Hall, Remillard Brickyard, and McLaren Residence. Additionally, any Miwok Indian mounds should be preserved.

CONSERVATION

OBJECTIVES

- Preserve the natural setting and habitat areas of the City particularly the Northridge of Mt. Tamalpais, Greenbrae Ridge, Corte Madera Creek, and marsh and Bay.
 - Undeveloped or slightly developed ridges and hillsides shall be left in a natural state.
 - Direct frontage to the Bay should be protected to preserve the unique wildlife, marshlands and view of this area.
 - New development should be required to preserve some natural landscape.
 - Corte Madera Creek banks and sloughs shall be protected from development.
- The special significance of the Central Business District in characterizing “old Larkspur” is recognized; incentives should be taken to preserve and enhance this area.
- Energy conservation should be promoted through appropriate land use and transportation policies.
- Any new building on ground subject to erosion, failure in seismic activity, or other unstable conditions should be limited to low density and low intensity uses.
- Acceptable levels of risk should be set for hazards identified in the Seismic Safety and Public Safety Elements, and development and conservation standards should be adopted based on these risk levels.
- Location and design of development should incorporate treatment of noise impact of the development and of surrounding sources.

ANALYSIS

The Conservation Element is designed to protect the viability of natural and human ecosystems. Guided by the policy set forth in the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970, it serves as a framework for evaluating the potential environmental impact of projects undertaken or approved by the local government: such projects must conform to the Conservation Element of the General Plan. The Conservation Element enumerates those natural and cultural resources and processes important to a community (whether within or beyond the incorporated limits) and defines the ways in which they should be preserved or used in a manner of planned conservation. Within the General Plan itself the Conservation Element is directly tied to open space, safety, seismic safety, housing, and noise, and has major implications for land use and circulation. *The objectives enumerated in other elements which relate to resource conservation can be considered components of the Conservation Element.*

Among the resources to be included are: surface and ground water, soil, minerals, energy, biological ecosystems and habitats, cultural resources, and scenic features. Because of the obviously regional scope of many resources, intergovernmental and inter-agency coordination is essential to the Conservation Element. The State of California General Plan legislation is quite explicit about cooperative regional water resource planning and encourages coordination in such matters as air pollution control, fish and game, shoreline conservation and transportation.

The Larkspur Conservation Element fits within the framework set by those portions of the Countywide Plan which relate to conservation. Among the most important conservation sections of the Countywide Plan are: 1) water quality, wildlife and wetlands preservation through conservation policies affecting stream, shore, and watershed areas; 2) pollution control and energy conservation through appropriate land use and transportation policies and programs; 3) soil conservation through grading limitations, slope controls, and zoning for appropriate densities.

Of particular interest in Larkspur are the impact of development—for example, in terms of grading, density, extent of impermeable surfaces, and surface hydrology—on the hill, ridge, and canyon landscapes and associated wildlife. Also important are the implications of the cost, location and design of future housing for 1) income level and age of new residents, 2) circulation system, 3) the visual character of the community. Detailed material on the existing natural and socio-physical environment in Larkspur is available in the research reports prepared for this 1973 General Plan update.

TECHNICAL ELEMENTS

The “technical elements” of seismic safety, public safety, and noise were added in 1972 as mandatory components of the General Plan in recognition of the critical role these factors play in public health, safety, and welfare. Prior to formulating these elements study was made of seismic, soils and geologic conditions in the Larkspur area and on noise impacts along Highway 101.

SEISMIC SAFETY OBJECTIVES

- The City of Larkspur recognizes the general susceptibility of the entire Bay area to seismic disturbances. Although the City does not rest directly upon a known active earthquake fault, it is recognized that adverse effects will be experienced to some extent in Larkspur whenever an earthquake occurs in the Bay Area.
- Geologic information necessary for adequate regulatory action should be assembled and mapped.
- Significant existing structures should be evaluated as to their structural condition, and the geologic conditions at their site should be recorded.
- Standards should be developed and adopted to govern future building design and land use. These standards should be related to the degree of potential seismic risk at particular locations.

SEISMIC SAFETY ANALYSIS

The conditions which give rise to seismic and related geologic hazards are in part a function of both natural and man-made conditions. The geologic and soils conditions, in conjunction with the seismic tendencies of the region, constitute conditions which cannot be readily altered, but which can be taken into account through planning and regulatory processes. Man-made features, chiefly structures, can be modified through proper design and preventive measures, so as to minimize the effects of uncontrollable seismic activity. Both planning procedures and regulatory actions can assist in securing the basic objective of limiting future earthquake losses.

- The hazards identified and evaluated include:
- Susceptibility to surface ruptures from faulting
 - Ground shaking
 - Ground failures
 - Seismically induced water motions
 - Mudslides
 - Landslides
 - Slope failure.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The Public Safety Element presents the basic framework by which the City can take action to minimize the social, economic, and environmental losses that may result from fire, flood, or geologic disturbance.

As part of the seismic and safety considerations, the City should determine a policy of acceptable levels of risk in the light of the hazards identified. The City should consider the threat posed by fires and loss of access, water, or communications due to seismic or geologic disturbances. The hazard identification and the risk policy will serve to guide the abatement actions to be undertaken by the City. Such actions should address the correction or lessening of existing hazards as well as the regulatory measures governing the location and conditions of new development in the City.

In addition to regulation and abatement actions, the City should prepare a comprehensive disaster plan designed to cope with all possible emergencies, such as fire, flood, explosion, earthquake, earth slides, and major traffic accidents. The disaster plan should be revised and expanded as more detailed information about seismic, geologic, and fire hazards are identified.

CIRCULATION

OBJECTIVES

- Provide safe transportation facilities and services for the movement of people and goods through a coordinated system of public transit, highways, bike paths, foot paths and ferries.
 - Use of automobiles should be de-emphasized and alternatives to the automobile provided.
 - Intra-County public transit should be expanded.
 - Pedestrian and bicycle facilities should be considered as alternative modes of access to major activity centers and transportation terminals.
 - Expand bus routes and establish bus lanes along major arterials.
- Coordinate circulation programs with regional agency goals regarding land use, population, employment and urban development. The transportation system will be used as a means of guiding development according to these goals.
- Insure that facilities for transportation do not impinge upon irreplaceable resources such as the Bay and its shoreline, other important open space lands, and recreational facilities.
- Design circulation programs to minimize negative impact on the physical and social environment.
- Place priority on the integrity of Larkspur as a community rather than mobility of traffic through the City if this mobility would mean creating thoroughfares which divide the City or reduce its livability.
- Emphasize efficient use of existing transportation facilities as an alternative to constructing new facilities.
 - Before approving new road facilities, evaluate corridors for transit rights-of-way and for the possibilities of transit alternatives.
- Insure that earthquake and seismic factors are considered in the planning, location, and construction of new transportation facilities.
- Take action to improve conditions where avoidable hazards are known to exist.

Specific Circulation Recommendations

- In the Larkspur area, Sir Francis Drake Boulevard should serve as the major arterial linking Larkspur and Lower Ross Valley traffic to Highway 101. This is consistent with the regional circulation role assigned to Drake in the Countywide Plan. It may, however, have the effect of cutting off Greenbrae from southern portions of Larkspur. Safe pedestrian and cyclist crossing of Drake Boulevard will be particularly important.
- East of Highway 101, Sir Francis Drake Boulevard should be considered for designation as a scenic highway or bridge approach route.
- Through traffic now using Magnolia Avenue should be routed around the Central Business District.
 - For traffic south of Corte Madera Creek: through traffic should travel on Magnolia Avenue as far south as Doherty then along a realignment of Doherty Drive to connect with an interchange at Highway 101 and Lucky Drive.
 - Magnolia Avenue south of Doherty Drive should be for local use. Through traffic should be discouraged.
- There should be extensive reworking of the Highway 101 interchange system.
- The Larkspur site near the mouth of Corte Madera Creek is deemed most suitable for a ferry terminal because of its proximity to major transportation routes and existing and planned intensive development in Larkspur.

ANALYSIS

As in Marin County as a whole, population growth in Larkspur has been accompanied by even more rapid rise in mobility. Major dependence has been placed on the private automobile, although bus service and ridership—primarily commuter bus service to San Francisco—have improved since early 1972. As development proceeds up Ross Valley, traffic rises along major arterials such as Sir Francis Drake Boulevard which link Valley communities to the “spine” of eastern Marin County, Highway 101. This traffic must traverse communities such as Larkspur lying near the base of the Valley. Eastern Marin’s tendency to serve as a suburb of San Francisco and the concentration of commerce along the

NOISE GUIDELINES

- The City of Larkspur recognizes that a major source of environmental pollution, and consequent human stress, results from high or sustained levels of noise within the City. The City should enact measures to minimize the occurrence of, or adverse effects of, excessive noise levels.
 - Locations of permissible noise levels should be regulated.
 - Location and design of development should be such as to reduce the impact of surrounding noise.
- The Noise Element is concerned with measurement of present and projected noise levels in the *vicinity of existing and proposed major transportation elements.*

IMPLEMENTATION

A variety of actions can be taken on recommendations made in the General Plan. At the City level a prerequisite is provision of adequate staff and budget to administer and implement the Plan. This should be complemented by appropriate policies and programs at the agency and special district, County, state, and federal levels. A detailed inventory of recommended actions is included in the full General Plan text. The following summarizes the fundamental aspects:

Zoning conformity with the General Plan
The major method of regulating land use and development in a locality is the zoning ordinance. Performance standards established in the subdivision ordinance are another, closely-related regulatory device. State law requires that there be “conformity” between the adopted General Plan and zoning in the sense that certain zones will allow uses consistent with long range recommendations for an area.

Capital improvement and public service programs
Whereas zoning and subdivision ordinances are essentially regulatory, capital improvement and public service programs require active government participation. These programs would schedule government spending for physical facilities and services over a specified time period according to priorities set by the community. Although priorities in financing have not yet been determined in Larkspur, several significant capital projects are named in this Plan, some of them dependent on federal, state, or County participation. The following require at least partial financial involvement on the part of the City:

The Open Space and Recreation Element calls for acquisition of land in the Northridge, mini-park acquisition and development, and historic site preservation.

Circulation improvements include establishing facilities such as shelters to enhance bus transit; redesigning major arterials for bus lanes; creating pedestrian and cyclist routes; re-routing Doherty between North Magnolia and Highway 101 with the cooperation of Corte Madera; building special unimpeded crossings for pedestrians and cyclists on busy routes.

In the area of the Central Business District, re-routing of through traffic along Doherty Drive creates the potential for expanded pedestrian spaces along Magnolia; public parking in the Central Business District should be improved; and a special program for assistance in enhancing the area might be instituted.

Finally, an inventory of public facilities has suggested that the City should anticipate need for improved and expanded library facilities and possible need for additional space for City employees.

Specific plans
Effective implementation of this General Plan calls for the following future specific studies and plans:

- A detailed housing plan.
- Studies of geologic and soil conditions and ground water.
- Assessment of public safety hazards and establishment of a disaster plan.
- Adoption of development standards relating to geologic and safety hazards.
- A plan for traffic, parking, and general enhancement of the Central Business District.
- Re-routing of through traffic now using Magnolia Avenue.
- A comprehensive San Quentin Peninsula plan.

Some of these could be included in the program for special public services.

Highway 101 corridor accentuate the need to travel east and west through valleys to the north-south route, Highway 101. On weekends, considerable traffic passes through the valleys en route to western Marin.

At the County level, transportation planning spearheaded by the County Balanced Transportation Plan has taken a leading role in shaping the future of Marin. Among the Baltran regional policies endorsed in this Plan are:

- Controlled community growth.
- Expansion of the bus transit system, particularly intra-County transit. It is recognized that support for such transit must be at least Countywide and preferably multi-county.
- Limited highway expansion (particularly Highway 101) but no new freeways.
- Implementation of the Balanced Transportation Program through legislation, projects and various funding sources.

The basic task is to mesh these policies with local needs and endorse region-wide programs fostering alternative modes of transportation which will promote public safety, convenience and well being.

Given an anticipated rise in population, mobility, and activity in the Lower Ross Valley, it is quite possible that volume of vehicles on surface streets will rise with or without public transit. Several factors will influence the transportation modes available within the life span of this Plan. One is the actual level of service provided by public transit. At this time, service in Marin County, particularly for trans-Bay trips, has been steadily improving in convenience and ridership for the last few years. Local transit service has lagged somewhat. Continued financial and ridership support is required within the County. Secondly, the relative availability of fuels and costs of different transportation forms, especially the private auto, are now shifting. In the future public transit and other alternatives to individual auto use may become increasingly in demand.

It is a policy of the General Plan to place integrity and livability in Larkspur above convenient mobility if such a conflict ever arises. The Plan seeks to prevent the City from being overwhelmed by heavy through traffic and to promote safe, convenient local movement.

However, this policy must be balanced against the possibility of future traffic pressures. The Plan distinguishes routes according to their relative volumes of traffic and predominant use for local or through traffic. In the future, congestion on certain routes recommended for regional arterial function may prompt the City to widen them.

SCENIC HIGHWAYS

Scenic highways are routes which receive official designation by the County or state government. They can be urban or rural: a state or County rural scenic highway is a route along which “all natural scenic resources and aesthetic values are protected and enhanced.” As an official scenic route, a highway would be subject to site planning, sign regulation, landscaping, and design requirements. The type and intensity of development of adjacent lands would be subject to special controls.

On the San Quentin Peninsula, two routes should be considered scenic rural highways: Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and a proposed new route along the southern edge of the Peninsula. The suitability of these routes as scenic highways is contingent on phasing out San Quentin Penitentiary and establishing a park on state lands. Additionally, development of the ferry terminal and the property north of the terminal site must be compatible with scenic route standards. A second, City park should be established adjacent to the Bay, and landscaping of lands along the section of Drake near Highway 101 should ensure a good view of the Bay and open space on the Peninsula.

THE LOWER ROSS VALLEY COMMUNITY

By covering a Plan Area which extends beyond “City Limits” and discussing ways in which Larkspur-Corte Madera cooperation would benefit both cities, this General Plan recognizes the interdependence of communities within the Lower Ross Valley regardless of political boundaries. In terms of school attendance areas, parks and open space, shopping facilities, traffic circulation, and a host of other matters, the actual and potential cooperation among Lower Ross Valley communities and sub-communities is extensive. Within the decade of the 1970’s, incorporation of non-City areas within Larkspur’s “sphere of influence” may be considered. Even more significant is the potential merging of Larkspur and the Town of Corte Madera. Because of the benefits which would be gained in terms of efficiency of government and public services, enhanced planning of land uses and traffic circulation, and balanced tax base, such a merger should be seriously considered by both communities.

PLAN ADOPTION AND REVISION

Several levels of community participation and governmental review have gone into formulation and adoption of the Plan. First, the Plan reflects a reevaluation of community goals and objectives by residents in the Citizens’ Advisory Committee, making use of current information on the socio-economic features of the City and conditions within the natural and man-made environment. During this phase County and special agency planning relating to Larkspur was solicited and incorporated into the planning process. Next, in a series of public hearings the Plan was reviewed and approved by the Planning Commission. City Council review and adoption followed.

The scope of the Plan is such that periodic modification may be appropriate to ensure that it reflects changing conditions and community and regional priorities. However, state legislation allows no more than three Plan amendments within a year. Proposed amendments would require the same procedure as General Plan adoption: public hearings and approval by both the Planning Commission and City Council.

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CREDITS

The Larkspur City Council adopted this General Plan by Resolution 1830 on December 3, 1973.

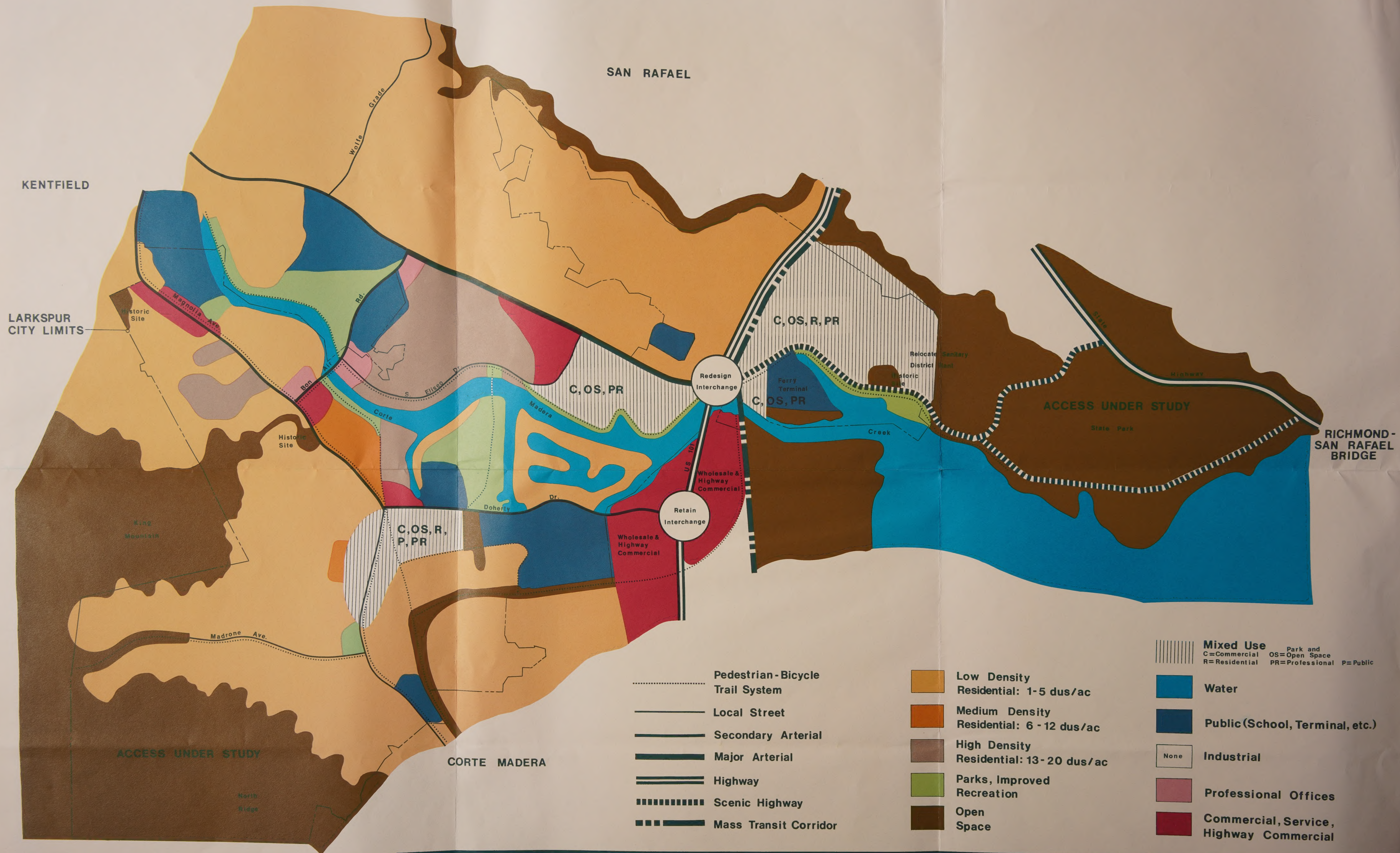
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